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Jason Elliott Clark

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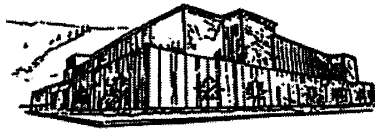
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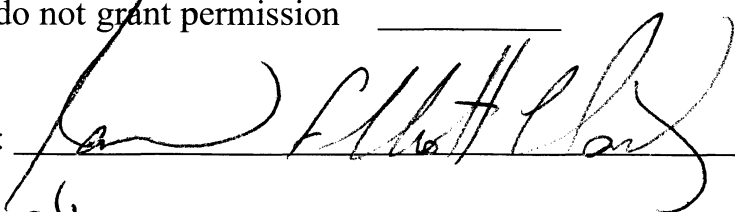
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MYTHS AND LEGENDS

By

Jason Elliott Clark

B.F.A. University of Montana, Montana, 2000

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

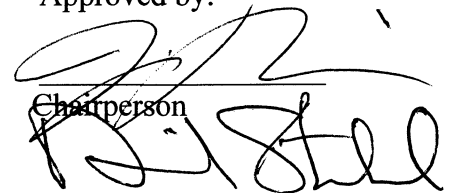
For the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

May, 2004

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. J. Stull', written over a horizontal line.

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

7-15-04

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## Myths and Legends

Chairperson: James Bailey 

Traditionally among the Algonquin speaking people, oral tradition was one of the most important methods of teaching and passing on the sacred knowledge and practices. These Algonquin legends and stories are very important to me because they define and explain our origins, our environment, and life in general. These legends explain why events occur and how to act and react to our environment. It is through these legends that I am given the knowledge and tools to live in the world.

My work is rooted in the traditional teachings and beliefs of my ancestors and the erroneous teachings and beliefs of western society about Native Americans. The subjects portrayed in my art are from personal experiences, the legends of my Algonquin heritage, and what people are being taught about Native Americans by western culture through various transmitters of misinformation. The reality that both my Algonquin culture and the dominant culture each have legends and stories that the other perceives to be invalid myths and fabrications intrigues me. My work is based on this reality. I am taking myths and legends from both cultures and visually exploring them from both a Contemporary Woodland Art and a western aesthetic. I use these two distinct styles to speak in two voices and to reflect my own existence as being both of Indian and European decent. These two voices speak of two parallel cultures, one not subordinate to or assimilating the other. They both speak of the same issue, the use of legends and myths as a tool for teaching the generations to come.

These are creations that convey broader cultural values and beliefs. I am not seeking to copy the traditional art forms of the past, but to interpret them into contemporary art so I can explore their meanings and use them in the context of my life. My intent is to extract central philosophical values or principles from these stories that are pertinent today. For me it is a way of preserving knowledge for my children and future descendants.

# Myths and Legends

***Myth-** a fable; a fictitious person or thing; imaginary; an old story about imaginary people. A commonly believed but false idea. A fiction or half-truth, especially one that forms part of an ideology.*

***Legend-** a traditional story; a story that is based on real events, people, places etc. a story coming down from the past; especially: one popularly regarded as historical although not verifiable. A story that has been passed down for generations, especially one that is presented as history.*

My work is rooted in the traditional teachings and beliefs of my Algonquin ancestors and the erroneous teachings and beliefs of Western society about Native Americans. The issues portrayed in my art are inspired by my dual Algonquin and European heritage, they stem from personal experiences, the legends of my Algonquin ancestors and what people are being taught about Native Americans by Western culture through parents, teachers, textbooks, films, television, cartoons, consumer advertisements, products, and other transmitters of information and misinformation. My work deals with subjects and situations that I have observed or experienced first hand. These are the stories that have shaped and formed my life. They illustrate how I see the world around me and how I have learned to respect it. The images and stories in my work are reflections or parts of me.

My goal is to expose these myths and legends to the audience who is not familiar with them so they will get a sense of what they are about and the concepts learned from them. My intention is also to remind those who might be familiar with them of their importance.

Myths and legends are an organized collection of stories from which a culture can explain their beliefs and their history. Beneath the story lines, myths and legends usually address major issues such as the origin of humanity, its traditions, and the way in which the natural and human worlds function. Myths and legends serve many purposes. They grant continuity and stability to a culture. They foster a shared set of perspectives, values, history, and literature, in the stories themselves. They justify a culture's activities and actions. Myths and legends establish a culture's customs, rituals, religious beliefs, laws, social structures, power hierarchies, territorial claims, arts and crafts, holidays and other recurring events, and technical tips for hunting, warfare, and other endeavors. They explain the unexplainable. They reveal our fate after death, and the reasons for crises or miracles. Myths also satisfy our need to understand the natural world; they answer the question, why are things the way they are.

Through these communal tales, we are connected to one another, to our ancestors, to the natural world surrounding us, and to society. They present guidelines for living. When myths and legends tell about the activities and attitudes of deities, the moral attitude shows society's expectations for our own behaviors and standards. They offer role models; children and adults pattern themselves after the heroes striving for the strength, persistence, and courage that are demonstrated by these characters. We each have our own myths and legends. Consciously or unconsciously, we create our own stories. We have our deities, the things that are valued and important to us personally. We are the heroes in our various journeys and romanticized passages through life.

Traditionally among the Algonquin people the stories and legends were one of the principal ways the people had to keep continuity and stability throughout time in the tribal culture. It was through these legends and stories that the members of the tribe were given the knowledge and tools to survive and live in the world. Since there were no libraries, books, Internet, radios, movies, and televisions, the storyteller's voices, hand movements, and facial expressions served as the tools for instruction and entertainment. Storytelling was and is a very versatile method of education because tone, style, delivery, and vocabulary can be combined not only with traditional legends but also with modern themes and content. These legends show the connection and meaning between the present and past in the life of the Algonquin people. They are layers and layers of history, representing a collection of individual experiences, community history, and cultural identity.

The Algonquin people define their legends and stories in two categories, old stories and new stories. Old stories, often called myths by Western culture, tell of deities and supernatural beings, the creation of the landscape, plants, animals, why certain animals are formed the way they are, and how they came to be, explanations for unexplainable or unnatural occurrences. For the Algonquin people the old stories are not considered myths, imaginary events, or fables. They are actual events that occurred anciently and actual supernatural beings that still exist and interact with people today. These stories have been told from generation to generation.

New stories involve specific personal experiences and/ or experiences of ancestors and relatives such as siblings, parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc. Some of these stories like the old stories have been told for many generations, while others are more recent, including events that might have happened yesterday. Both the old and new stories are often lengthened giving more details or shortened thereby getting to the point quicker. They are not fixed or static, they are more fluid and they can be tailored to the audience. There is no Algonquin distinction between myth and legend, both old and new stories are considered true and factual.

I am interested in using the legends and stories from my Algonquin heritage to understand and react to my environment and as a teaching tool for my children. It is apparent that the dominant society and native societies each have their own sets of legends and myths about Native American history and culture. Two distinct parallel cultures that teach or present, to the general public, their own version of native culture and history. From the dominant society's point of view, the legends and stories that I consider to be true, important, and vital to my children's upbringing are nothing more than fictitious myths developed by a primitive group of people. From my point of view, I consider a lot of the historical facts and perceptions that the dominant society teaches to be nothing more than fictitious myths generated by the society to justify their beliefs and actions. Some examples of these might be that Columbus "discovered" America in 1492 as a land minimally inhabited by uncivilized savages who were not able to contribute anything to the world; all Indians look alike, having the same

physical and cultural characteristics; Indians were and are obstacles to overcome in the spread of civilization across the continent and that Manifest Destiny was the natural occurrence to European invasion; and for a lot of Euro-American families there is a myth that one of their ancestors, usually a grandmother was an Indian princess.

## **ARTISTIC PROGRESSION AND INFLUENCES**

When looking to historical influences in my art, I have always gravitated toward Native American artists for inspiration. Norval Morrisseau, the founder of the Contemporary Woodland Indian Art or Algonquin legend painting (fig. 1), has been one of the most influential artists for me. This style of art impacted me both aesthetically and conceptually. I was drawn to the bold formline structure that seemed to flow around and define the figures and the x-ray representations of internal structures and spirit animals or beings that were contained within the main figures. I was also intrigued by this important style of Indian art because the principal focus was the visual realization of oral traditions of the Algonquin people, the same legends and stories that were taught to me by my family.

As a boy I was exposed to and intensely studied the art of the Northwest Coast Indians. I think I was formally enticed by the strong black formlines and the simple shapes used to make complex compositions. I was very interested in this artwork because it was a two-dimensional Indian based art form. I believe that the same aesthetic response attracted me to both the Northwest Coast Indian art and to Morrisseau's work.

As I started my undergraduate career I began to explore the Algonquin Legend Painting style by incorporating the flowing black formline and x-ray representations into my own work. I have been interested in visually dealing with the stories and legends of my Algonquin heritage and this newfound art style was perfect for me to experiment with. I wanted not to copy Morrisseau's style but to understand it and interpret it for myself. I soon found myself pouring over images of the ancient rock paintings (fig. 3& 4) that are found in the traditional Algonquin homeland and the figurative motifs and sacred symbols that are found in the birch bark scrolls (fig. 5) and hide paintings (fig. 6) of the Ojibwa Midewiwin Society, which are central elements in the ritual life of this society. I began incorporating these stylistic elements and motifs into my work, which enhanced my prints by adding another layer of information both visually and through content.

As time progressed I started incorporating not just old stories like Morrisseau had done, but new stories of my ancestors, family, and personal experiences. I wanted to deal with contemporary native issues that I felt were important not only to me but to everyone. I wanted to make my work more accessible to Western viewers so I stopped using the native based art styles and started appropriating Western images of Indians in the form of photographs, stereotype images, and advertising images. The prints that I produced during this time were very direct and to the point but they seemed too angry and confrontational for me.

I have most recently been looking at native artists that work with native



issues and incorporate humor into their work. Carl Beam is a contemporary Ojibwa printmaker who appropriates historic photographs and puts them into new contexts. The ethnographic revision in Beam's etching, *The Proper Way to Ride a Horse* (fig. 7), is addressing the ethnographic practices of the nineteenth century anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing. Cushing and other anthropologists collected thousands of objects of Native American culture, took them out of context, and put them on display in museums for all to see, labeling them as artifacts of a dying race. In the photograph that Beam has appropriated, Cushing is showing the dress and gear of a Dakota Sioux Warrior. Taken out of context, this pose looks ridiculous, a half-naked grown man on a rocking horse. He is made to look even more a fool when he is pictured next to Big Bear, Louis Riel, Geronimo, and Sitting Bull, revered freedom fighters of the nineteenth century. I am incorporating certain aspects of Beam's work into my own by using photographs taken out of context and manipulating them to show the humor and irony in specific beliefs about Native Americans.

T.C. Cannon is another native artist that has influenced my work. In Cannon's lithograph, *Waiting for the Bus (Anadarko Princess)* (fig. 8), he depicts a seated Indian woman in traditional Plains Indians dress holding an umbrella and a handbag. The incorporation of the traditional elements with the modern in this piece is something that I have incorporated into my own work. Cannon has inspired me to incorporate the traditional Indian based art styles of the rock paintings, the bold formlines, and the birch bark and hide motifs and symbols along with the modern Western art elements such as photographs, advertising

motifs, and Indian stereotypes. By doing this I can address contemporary native issues and make them accessible to both native and Western viewers.

### **MYTHS AND LEGENDS THESIS EXHIBITION**

The reality that both my Algonquin culture and the dominant culture each have legends and stories that the other perceives to be invalid myths and fabrications intrigues me. My work is based on this reality. I am taking myths and legends from both cultures and visually exploring them from both a traditional Algonquin and a Western aesthetic. When I use a Western style or aesthetic in a piece I am addressing a myth or legend that the dominant society has of native people. When I use the Contemporary Woodland Indian Art style I am dealing with a legend or myth from my own life or from my Algonquin heritage. I use these two distinct styles to speak in two voices and to reflect my own existence as being both of Indian and European decent. These two voices speak of two parallel cultures, one not subordinate to or assimilating the other. They both speak of the same issue, the use of legends and myths as a tool for teaching the generations to come. My intent is to extract the central philosophical values or principles from these stories that are pertinent today. For me it is a way of preserving knowledge for my children and future descendants.

My native Algonquin tradition holds that every artifact, whether utilitarian, ceremonial, or artistic has multiple roles in the culture. Simple tools are often adorned with aesthetic elements, and at the same time both the object and its artistic treatment serve as a teaching device. My own upbringing in a traditional manner included this type of teaching. When my parents taught my

siblings and I they used old stories, new stories, work, object making, decoration, association, as well as references to observations of the world around them. All these tools are tied together to convey tradition, moral principles, spiritual significance, ethical questions, practical instructions, cultural aesthetics, and discipline.

If an individual has acts contrary to the norms of the culture, the adult or teacher will sit down and tell a story to the individual. The story references a traditional character or previous experiences from an ancestor or the teller's own life. The story usually ends with the storyteller asking if the story sparks the memory of another story or experience to the listener. Rather than pointing out the individual's wrong doing, this teaching style points out a possible consequence to the unwanted behavior. I try to incorporate this distinct style of teaching into my work. Judgment is not overtly rendered; instead the viewer is presented with a combination of stories or beliefs, and is left to make their own judgments.

In the reduction relief print, *The New Traditional Money Maker* (fig. 9), the viewer is presented with two primary stories. One is that of the historic Indian involvement in the fur trade while the other is that of modern tribal gaming and its economic impact on native culture and society.

In this print, I am using both modern and historical references to the economic plight of not only the Algonquin people but to many native populations here in the United States. I have placed the image of a beaver in the center of the picture plane to allude to its historic importance for the Indian and European inhabitants.

Jacques Cartier wrote in 1534 that he found Algonquin speaking tribesmen trading beaver furs to the fishermen who came ashore to dry their catches (Joseph, Jr., p.299). Shortly thereafter the French hat makers began fabricating a cheap, fine quality, and almost indestructible felt from the beaver furs coming from the Algonquin territory in the New World. This event drastically increased the demand for the beaver pelts. The new beaver market stimulated trade with the Indian tribes and they in turn began to war against each other for exclusive trade rights with the Europeans. This was the start of a bitter rivalry among the tribes for prime beaver trapping areas and trading rights that lasted over three hundred years. The pursuit of the beaver pelts replaced old customs. The way of life for many tribes had evolved and had become dependent upon the beaver and now could not be separated. Many tribes suffered great difficulty after the fur trade collapsed because they were tied so closely to this form of economy.

I have used both native and contemporary symbols within the form of the beaver. There are contemporary casino symbols, including shapes of cherries, numbers, dollar signs, and other slot machine iconography along with the four card suits, images of face cards in the tail, and dice depicted in the head of the animal. These shapes are accompanied by woodland decorative elements such as repeated stylized rib-like forms along the side of the beaver.

For me, the gaming industry on many of the reservations is like the fur trade of long ago, and the casino is much like the beaver. The perception for many is that this new economy on the reservations is traditional because Indians have

always gambled. The same justification could be applied to the fur trade by stating that Indians had always trapped beaver.

I have also included two basic architectural styles into this piece, using flat triangular and rectangular forms to signify teepees and skyscrapers. This adds to the notion of gambling being a traditional Indian activity but targeting Western society as the gambling patrons. I have placed text and symbols on the buildings to call attention to the stereotypic concepts and images that are being used to lure in the tourist public. Some are mocking and ironically humorous names for casinos which reference negative slang such as IN'JUN CASINO, while another proclaims BINGO HERE. The symbols include a white buffalo, a popularized kokopelli figure, and a stylized ceremonial horned mask.

In this piece, *The New Traditional Money Maker*, I am bringing up the question of what will happen if the tribes rely solely on this new economic form without looking at the experiences of the past. Will old traditional customs be replaced with pursuit of slot machines and card games? Will there be tribes that will suffer greatly when this new moneymaker comes to an end?

There are two pieces in the exhibition that deal with the legend of the Windigo. One reduction relief print titled *Windigo*, depicts the traditional concept of the Windigo, the other, an intaglio and relief print titled *Sacred Lands in Federal Hands*, depicts the Windigo in a more contemporary context. The Windigo is a creature of the Algonquin culture, imagination, and experience. It is the personification of both the physical and spiritual starvation. It may take on any number of forms: a supernatural cannibalistic giant, a phantom of hunger which

stalks the forests of the north in search of lone humans to consume, a personality disorder or disturbance in an individual who is crazed and performs acts of cannibalism, or a spirit with a heart of ice that flies through the night in search of victims to satisfy its hunger for human flesh. It epitomizes all those unhappy souls who die of starvation in the winter. Because Windigo is afflicted with never-ending hunger it can never get enough to eat and is always on the verge of starvation. In appearance The Windigo is described as being so thin that its dried skin is pulled tightly over its skeletal frame. It has an enormous head, a huge twisted mouth and great jagged teeth that are not covered by lips, and beady eyes. It has unlimited supernatural strength and speed and moves faster than the human eye could follow. It can change shape at will, making it blend into the trees and winds. It churns up the surface of the earth as it wanders about snapping off treetops or brushing the trees aside carelessly, as a man brushes aside grass. The Windigo gorges itself as if it will never eat again and lusts for more. It represents not only the worst that one human could do to another, but also greed, selfishness, gluttony, and excess.

The reduction relief print, *Windigo* (fig. 10), deals with the traditional belief of the Windigo and would be considered both an old story and a new story by the Algonquin people, but is considered a make believe myth by Western society. The Windigo is realized in this print as an emaciated giant with large teeth that has stalked its victim and is now reaching out to capture him. The setting of this piece is winter when the Windigo is most active and the hunters are out in the wilderness on their trap lines. The Windigo is the reason for the

numerous historical accounts of acts of cannibalism among the Algonquin people. There are several new stories that tell of families that have gone out onto their trap lines during the winter and because of specific reasons they are not able to find game to eat. One of the family members eventually turns windigo and eats their family members in order to survive. The Windigo has touched this person and turned them windigo. These events are understood but not tolerated by the Algonquin people. Traditionally, during the spring gathering, the individual begs to be put to death and it is usually granted because everyone knows that the individual has become windigo. In my print the story has the potential to be interpreted in two ways, the Windigo creature could grab the victim and consume him, therefore destroying the individual, or the creature could simply touch the victim and turn him windigo, which would then lead to the destruction of an entire family. The victim has his back turned toward the traditional form of the Windigo and therefore is oblivious to its advance. This victim is symbolic to my own extended family in that many of my aunts and uncles have turned their back on the traditional ways and have become oblivious to the Windigos that stalk them and their families.

In this piece titled *Sacred Lands in Federal Hands* (fig. 11), I am addressing the issue of lands deemed sacred by native peoples and how the federal governments deals with those lands. I have taken the concept of the greedy, selfish, gluttonous, excessive Windigo and attributed it to the U.S. Government. I have taken the image of Uncle Sam and made him into a Windigo holding a section of earth in his hand. Behind Uncle Sam is a map of North

America with numerous holes punched out of the print. These holes represent sacred places that are being controlled by the U. S. government. These sacred places are either completely closed off so there is no access to them by native people, or more often, they are turned into attractions and opened up for all who can afford admission. This devalues and an often time desecrates these sacred places that are so important to native people. Some examples of these locations would be the Black Hills (Mount Rushmore), Devil's Tower, the Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, and Chaco Canyon.

Along with the Windigo, there are other traditional Algonquin characters and concepts that are present throughout the exhibition that many may not be familiar with; therefore I have defined a few here below.

*MISIPISIW*- The Great Lynx or Water Lynx is the leader of the water spirits. The Water Lynx draws people down into the water to their deaths and causes floods. It is associated with danger and evil and has power over river and lake environments especially dangerous rapids. Unexplained deaths, especially drowning, are thought to be caused by the Water Lynx.

*MISIKINIPIK*- The Sea Serpent or Water Snake like the Water Lynx is associated with subterranean or underwater spaces that are considered hostile to human beings. Both water Lynx and Water Snakes are thought to possess horns and along with other beings associated with water, they are conceived of as eternally at war with the Thunder Beings who are identified as being good.

*BEAR*- The Algonquin think of the bear as the most intelligent and spiritually powerful of all terrestrial beings. The bear is often referred to as half



human and is regarded as a source of power for hunting, trapping, and curing sickness. The Algonquin people believe that they and the bear share a common ancestor and refer to the bear as brother.

*NANABUSH*- is one of the cultural heroes for the Algonquin. He is a transformer or shapeshifter and considered to be supernatural. Nanabush is considered to have the attributes of great magical power, infantile helplessness, wisdom, and stupidity. He is considered a hero but not one to emulate. He attempts to do well, but is often prevented from realizing his good intentions by the coarser side of his human nature, he blunders along and is only sometimes successful. He is the trickster that cannot be trusted or followed but is a teacher and he can be learned from through his actions. Nanabush is treated with mingled respect, contempt, and affection.

The piece titled *Fullblood, Half-breed, Quarter blood* (fig.12& 13), addresses the expectations of what an Indian should look like, how much Indian blood does one need to be considered an Indian, and the myth that all Indians have a collective identity and that tribal distinctions do not matter. I have appropriated and digitally manipulated historic and family photographs in order to convey this content. Each manipulated portrait has three elements to it. Each showcases the physical appearance and dress of each individual bringing the question to mind does this person look Indian? Are they dressed like an Indian?

Each print conveys the amount of Indian blood each individual has (fullblood, half-breed, or mixed blood) by the amount of color within each figure. Countless Indians today benefit or are hurt by the government's formulation

determining the degree of Indian blood of their ancestors. Some in fact have been designated as having more Indian blood than they actually have while others are deemed no longer Indian when certain government policies have gone into effect. A common practice of federal agents was to give blood quantum to individuals based on physical appearance. For example, if a child looked Indian, based on the agent's stereotypic ideas, the child was registered as fullblood, while their brother or sister with more European features was given a lesser degree of Indian blood. For this reason there are many siblings from the same parents that have different degrees of Indian blood. Members of some tribes that had their land allotted were given the status of fullblood whether they were or not. Euro-americans and Mexicans were given full-blood status if they were living with the tribe at the time of allotment. Other tribes that were living on reservations during the termination period were no longer considered or recognized by the federal government as having any Indian blood once their reservations were terminated. The issue of blood quantum is very important to both the federal government and to most Native Americans because it determines whether or not an individual can receive federal Indian aid for school, medical, and housing needs. There are many Native Americans today that cannot get a federally issued C.D.I.B. (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) card because of certain federal and tribal restrictions. The general standard is that an individual must be one-quarter Indian blood from one particular tribe to receive recognition. I personally know of individuals whose parents lineage is from three or more different tribes, therefore the child does not have enough Indian blood from a single tribe to be recognized as Indian even

though they are fullblood. In the Iroquois confederacy certain tribes are patrilineal societies while others are matrilineal societies, this too can cause other problems. When a woman from a patrilineal society marries a man from a matrilineal society their offspring has no claim to either tribe. This is often a problem with individuals who are not familiar with their traditional tribal beliefs, a situation that is quite common nowadays.

In this piece each image also has text identifying them their tribal affiliation, thereby addressing identity and culture. A major myth that Western society has of Native Americans is that they are all alike; all tribes are lumped together as one group. The truth is that in the United States alone there are about 2.1 million Indians, consisting of 511 federally recognized and 200 unrecognized culturally distinct tribes. These individuals live either on one of the 286 United States reservations, in rural communities or in cities across the country. Each tribe has their own history, religious beliefs and practices, legends and stories, language, worldview, political organization, response to environment, physical characteristics, and dress.

The installation as a whole forms an American flag addressing the issue as to whether or not these individuals are Americans from a Western point of view. Many of these people fought against the federal government to protect their families, land and way of life while others aided the government by serving in the military or administrative appointments. The majority of the tribes represented in this piece were not recognized, by Congress, as United States citizens until 1924 in gratitude for their service and sacrifice in World War I.

The piece *So Your Great Grandmother Was a Cherokee Indian Princess* (fig. 14,15& 16) deals with the common myth of many Euro-American families who believe that they have an Indian Princess ancestor. The European concept of royalty has never existed in any tribe in North America, but almost always this myth deals with a princess and she is usually a Cherokee. If this myth were actually true for every family that believes it, the Cherokee population in the United States would be far greater than it is today to parody this situation. This myth could stem from historic dealings between colonists and Native Americans and the guilt that Euro-Americans might have as a result or it could be an attempt to gain favor in the sight of Native Americans, but it is actually quite offensive to Native peoples and produces the opposite response. I have altered appropriated photographs of women by painting or printing stereotypic headbands, feathers, and beads on to these photographs to show the humor and absurdity of this myth.

Humor is a subtle but important aspect in my work. I want to bring up and deal with serious and important contemporary native issues, but I don't want to alienate the viewer with confrontational militaristic images. I would rather use subtle humor to uncover the differences and conflicts between the two cultures. Most agree that there is a distinct communal attitude that has been called native humor. It somehow jumps tribal distinctions and geographical boundaries. This native humor is identified by its teasing, overt punning, frequent word play, extreme subtlety, unique associations, and layers of serious reference. For me, irony plays an important role in my art. Irony could be interpreted as the opposite of what is actually shown or stated, the meaning is opposite of what the visual

might be. It could be a question and the answer being shown simultaneously. Irony is not just seeing the truth showing through the false but also seeing this duality at once, like a double exposure on one plate.

The reduction relief print, *Midnight Feedings* (fig. 17), is a new story dealing with personal family experiences. It also touches on the myth that western society has that all Indians are prone to addiction. It is true that there are Indians, who are alcoholics and drug abusers, but there are more that are not and this truth is the same for any race. Why do people turn to drugs? For Indians it might be attributed to escapism. Escaping the grief of losing one's family, friends, land, and culture. It also might be a way to cope with the social isolation, hopelessness, poverty, unemployment, and disease that are often felt by Indians both on and off the reservations. All of these problems facing Indians as a whole sometimes encourages the abuse of drugs and alcohol, however Indians are not the only ones that are abusing these substances both today and historically. This abuse among other ethnic groups is not always obvious due to their economic and social status or because they are not confined to specific areas like reservations.

This piece was inspired by a personal experience I had a short time ago. I had the opportunity to be a foster parent for two week-old squirrels that my son and I found in a woodpile we were moving. The experience of raising these squirrels soon became an ordeal because baby squirrels need to be fed every two hours both day and night. These squirrels quickly became a consistent assault and drain on my life. They were constantly making noise and demanding attention. The print depicts the two squirrels as gigantic beasts confronting the smaller the

human figure. I used these giant squirrels as symbols for the addictions like alcoholism, drug abuse, and food addictions that seem to be always confronting or attacking my extended family. I surrounded the figures with depictions of syringes, the tool that I used to feed the squirrels, to enhance the notion of or appearance of addiction.

### **SUMMARY**

I am focusing my work on the legends of my Algonquin people and the myths or untruths of western society. I use both traditional Algonquin and western art styles to best convey each cultures ideas. These are creations that convey broader cultural values and beliefs. I am not seeking to copy the traditional art forms of the past, but to interpret them into contemporary art so I can explore their meanings and use them in the context of my life and as teaching tools for the generations to come.

## **APPENDIXES**

**Relief printing-** Printmaking technique in which the image is printed from a raised surface, usually produced by cutting away non-image areas.

**Lithography-** Printing technique in which the image areas on a lithographic stone or metal plate are chemically treated to accept oil-based ink and repel water, while the non-image areas are treated to repel ink and retain water.

**Intaglio-** Printing technique in which paper is pushed into depressed or recessed lines made in a metal plate and filled with ink. The image can be made on the plate by acid or a sharp tool.

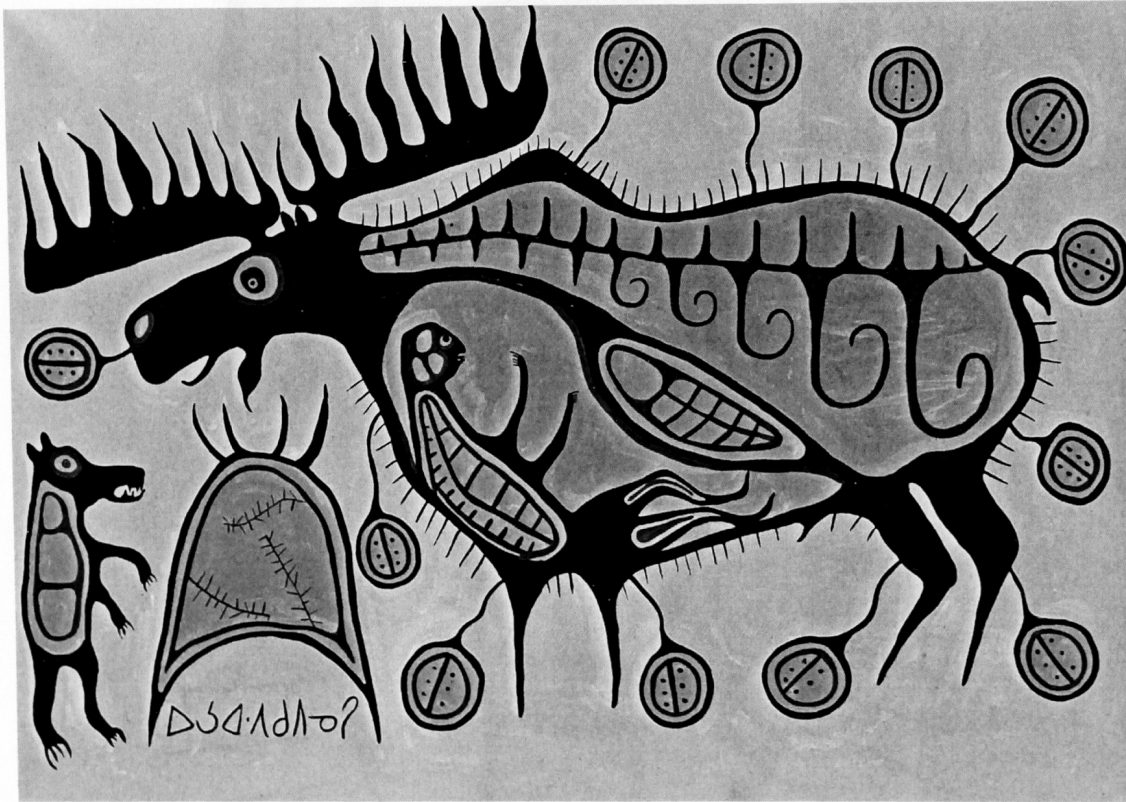


fig. 1. Norval Morrisseau, *Sacred Caribou with Spirit Man*, acrylic on canvas. Circa 1966.

fig. 2. Norval Morrisseau, *Autumn Harvest*, acrylic on canvas. Circa 1966.  
Illustration for "Windigo and Other Tales of the North" (1966).



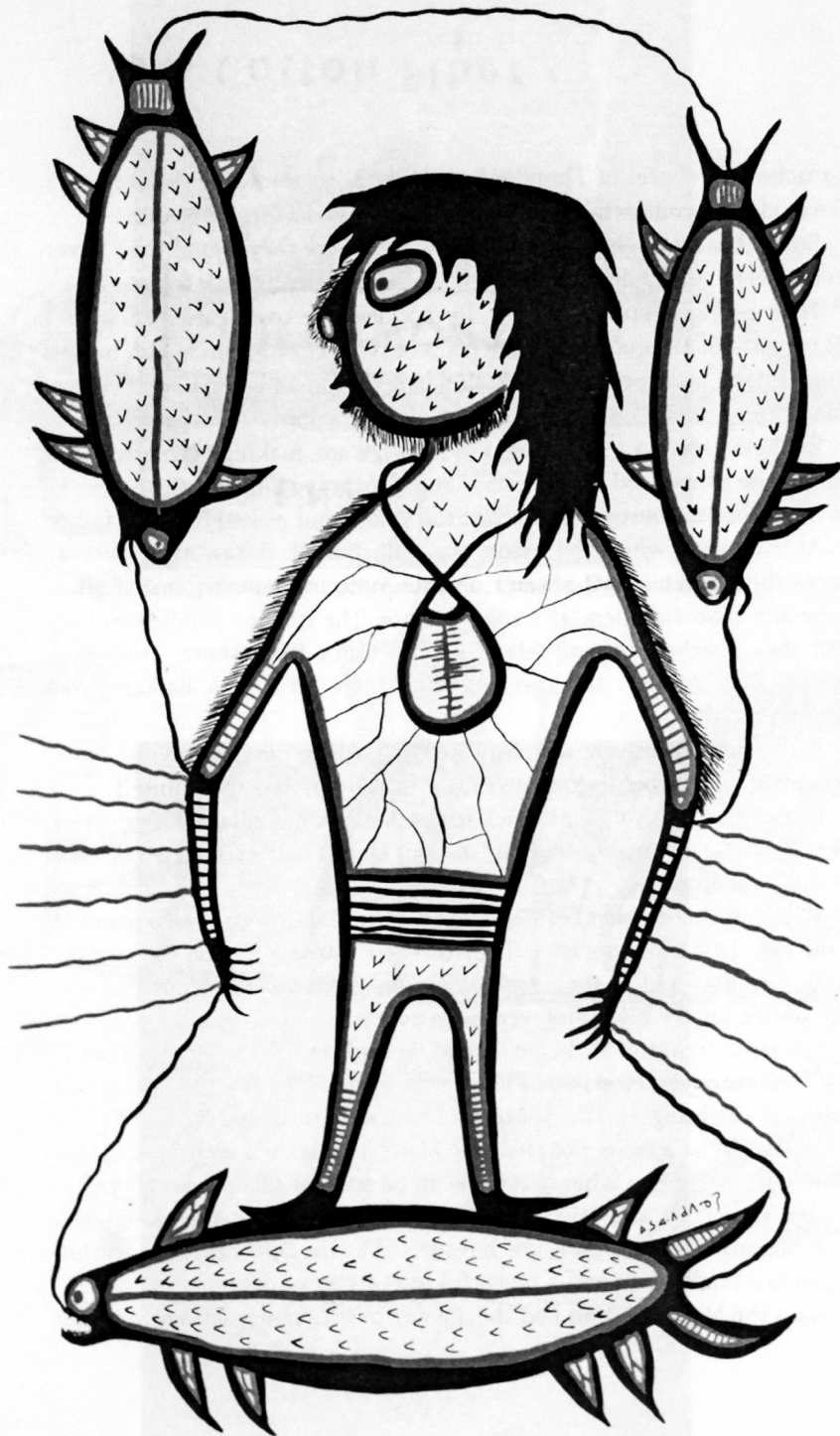


fig. 2. Norval Morrisseau, *Maymaygwasiwuk, Interpreter of Dreams*,  
Illustration for "Windigo and Other Tales of the Ojibway", 1969.

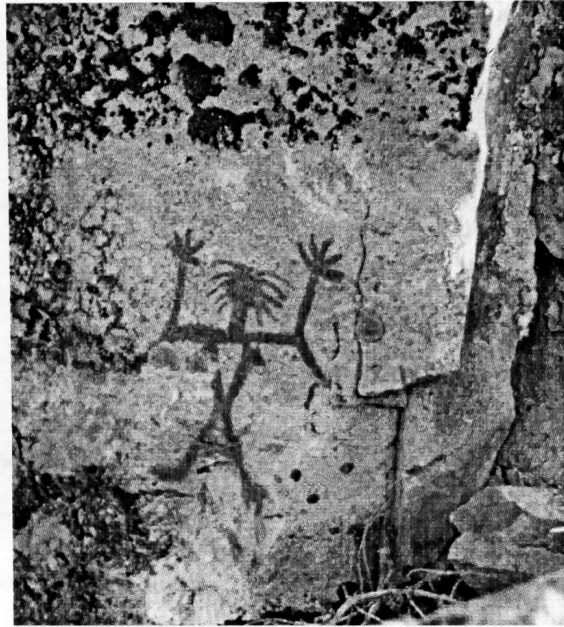


fig.3. Rock painting, red ochre. Ontario, Canada. Date unknown.



fig 4. Rock painting, red ochre. Hegman Lake, Minnesota. Date unknown.

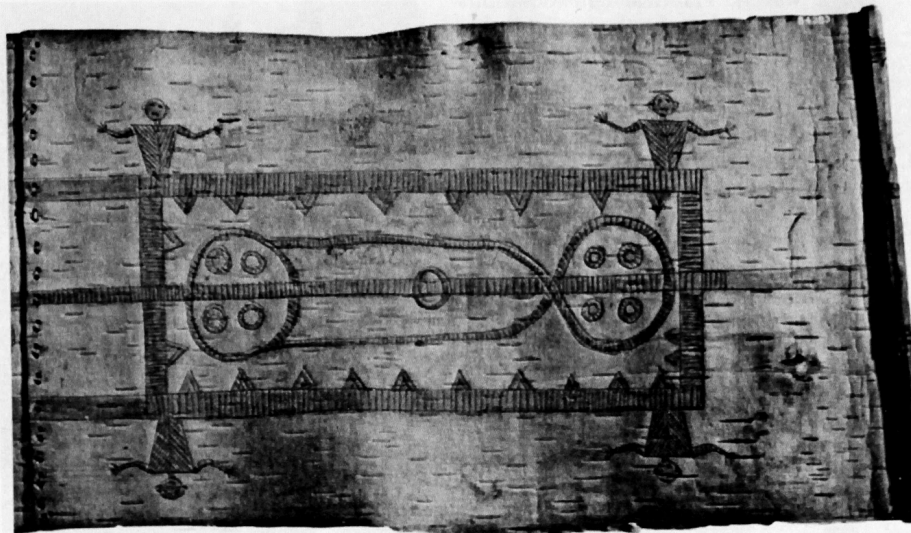


fig. 5. Unknown Midewiwin society member, inscribed drawing on a Birchbark scroll, date unknown.

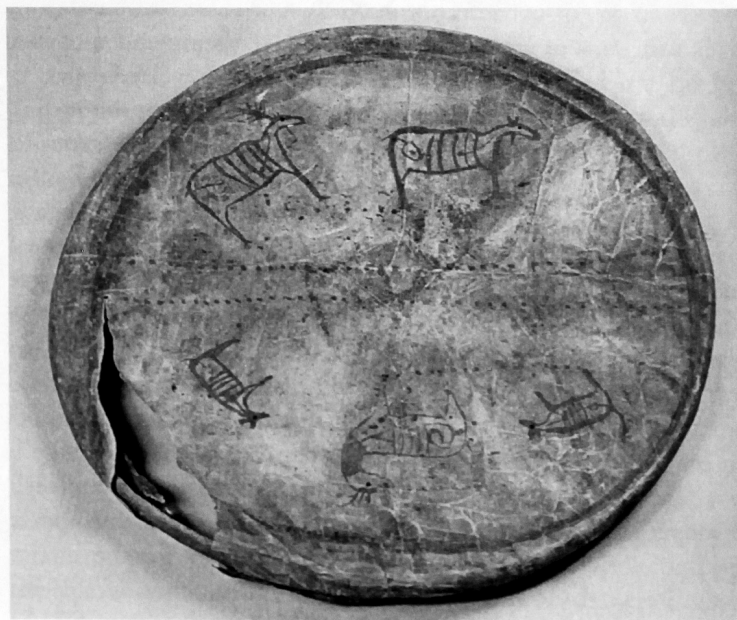


fig. 6. Unknown Anishnabe artist, bouble-beaded drum, hide, wood, red ochre, late 18 th. century.



fig. 7. Carl Beam, *The Proper Way to Ride a Horse*, etching, 1990.  
 Courtesy of Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.





fig. 8. T.C. Cannon, *Waiting for the Bus (Anadarko Princess)*, lithograph, 1977. Russell Walker Collection.



fig. 9. Jason Elliott Clark, *The New Traditional Money Maker*, reduction relief print, 2004.



fig. 10. Jason Elliott Clark, *Windigo*, reduction relief print, 2003.



fig. 11. Jason Elliott Clark, *Sacred Lands in Federal Hands*, intaglio and relief, 2003.





fig. 12. Jason Elliott Clark, *Fullblood, Half-breed, Quarter Blood* (detail), digital print, 2004.



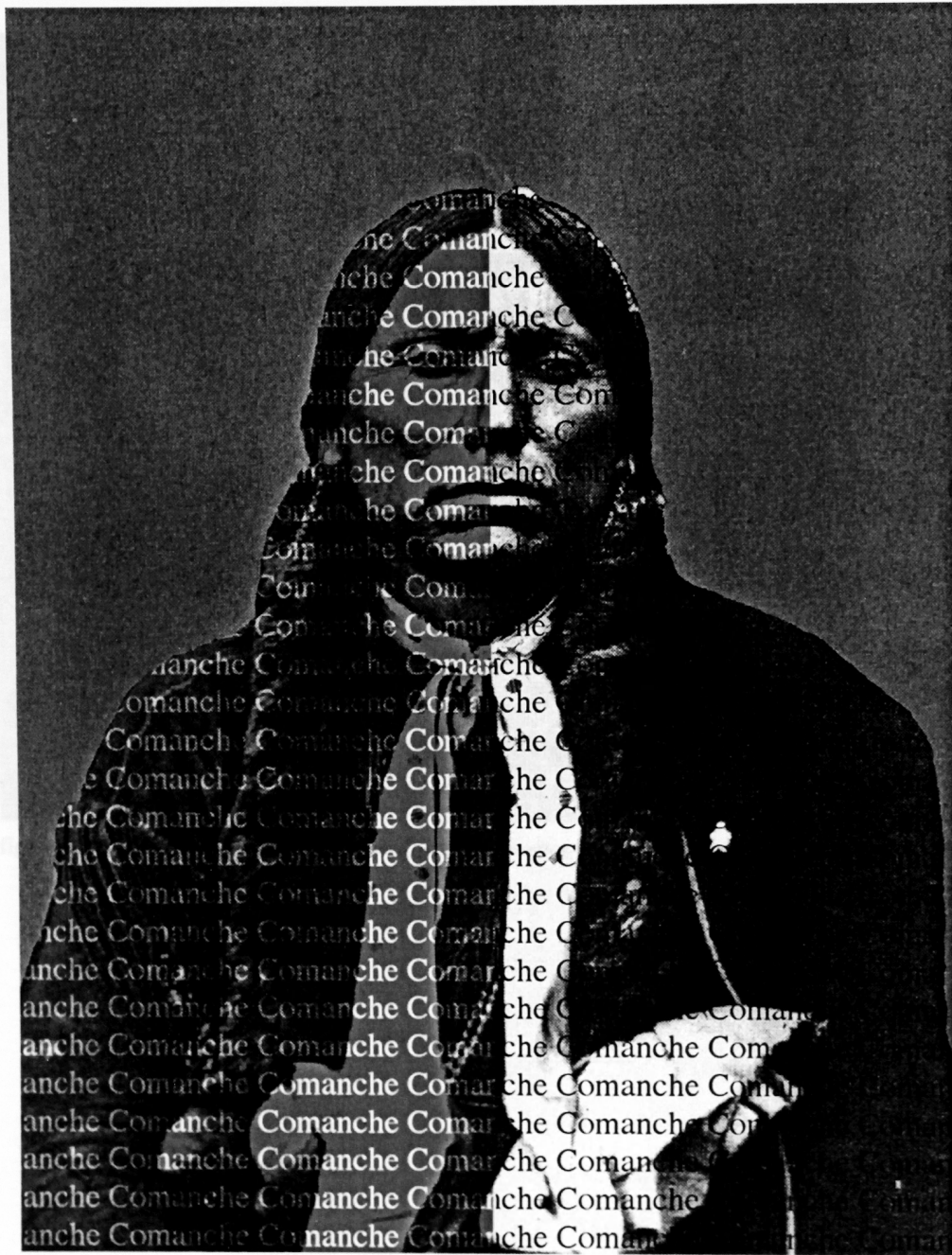


fig.13. Jason Elliott Clark, *Fullblood, Half-breed, Quarter Blood* (detail), digital print, 2004.



fig. 14. Jason Elliott Clark, *Fullblood, Half-breed, Quarter Blood*, digital prints, 2004.

fig. 15. Jason Elliott Clark, *On New Ground*, digital prints, 2004.



fig. 15. Jason Elliott Clark, *So Your Great Grandmother was a Cherokee Indian Princess* (detail),  
intaglio and serigraph, 2003.

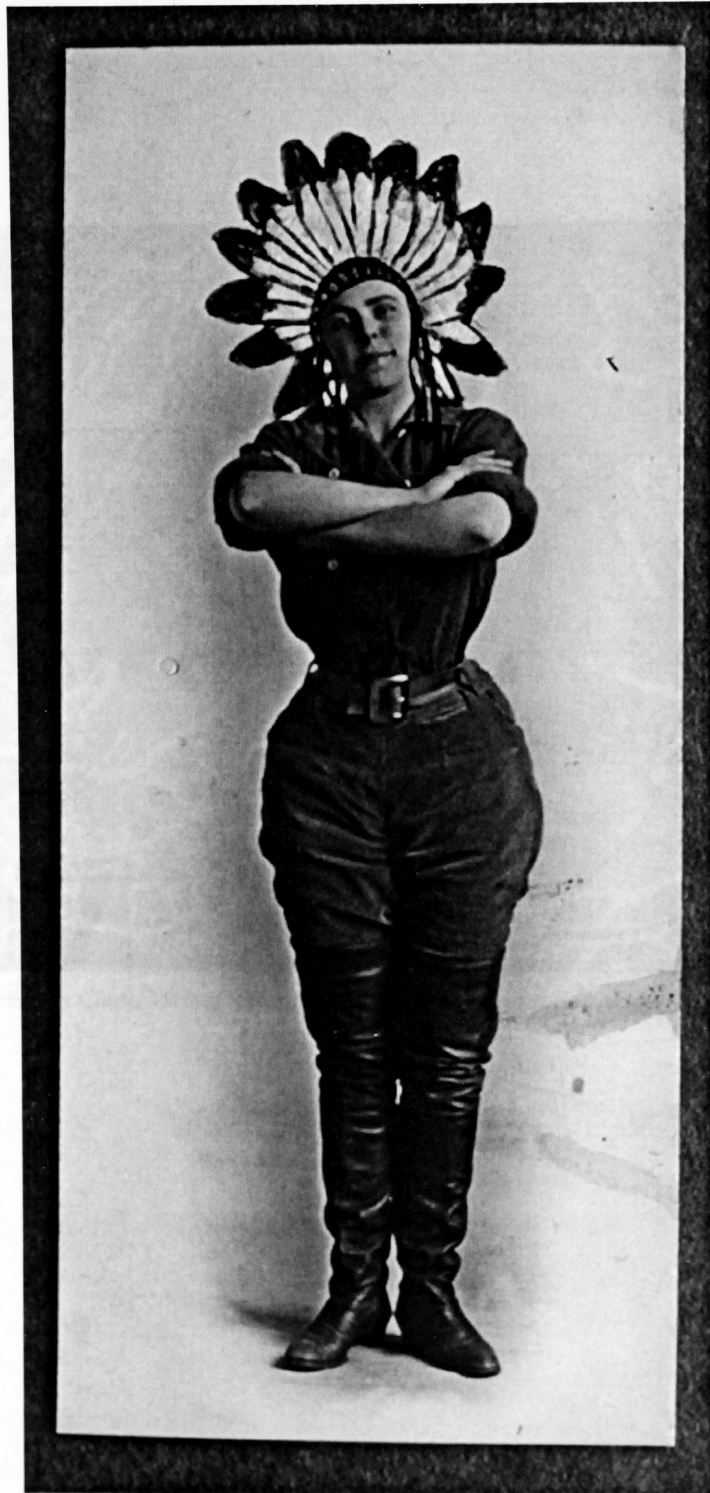


fig. 16. Jason Elliott Clark, *So Your Great Grandmother was a Cherokee Indian Princess* (detail), photograph and acrylic paint, 2003



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fig. 17. Jason Elliott Clark, *Midnight Feedings*, reduction relief print, 2003.

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